

# ASSESSING THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FIFTH THULE EXPEDITION FOR INUINNAIT AND INUIT KNOWLEDGE

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## ABSTRACT

This article considers the significance of Knud Rasmussen's Fifth Thule Expedition (1921–1924) to Inuinnaït of the Central Canadian Arctic. With the expedition's centennial anniversary, many scholars are assessing the impact of its research on their understandings of Inuit society during an era characterized by significant lifestyle transition and cultural change. For many Inuit, however, the expedition's importance lies in its direct communication with Inuit knowledge—in the form of stories, songs, material collections, and photos—which can be used to guide contemporary efforts of cultural revival. The ability to learn from, and apply, Inuit knowledge requires that it first be extracted from non-Inuit narratives, interpretive frameworks, and holding institutions. This article outlines the approach taken by the Inuinnaït organization Pitquhirnikkut Ilihautiniq/Kitikmeot Heritage Society to access, restore, and mobilize valuable Inuit knowledge documented during the expedition, and the role of this research in assessing the expedition's enduring significance.

## INTRODUCTION

The year 2021 marks the 100th anniversary of the Fifth Thule Expedition (FTE). The expedition was one of Arctic history's most ambitious research programs to document Inuit culture and prehistory, with an ultimate objective to shed light on the migration routes and origins of Arctic populations. Between 1921 and 1924, Danish-Greenlandic ethnographer Knud Rasmussen led a research team composed of Danish anthropologist Kaj Birket-Smith, archaeologist Therkel Mathiasen, and other Danish and Greenlandic team members, across the entirety of the North American Arctic—from Greenland to Siberia (see Harper and Krupnik; Michelsen; Kleist, *this issue*).

The FTE continues to be celebrated for the detailed observations, collections, and documentation its members produced about Inuit they encountered. Knud Rasmussen's linguistic and cultural fluency—resulting in part from his mixed European and Greenlandic Inuit heritage—enabled him to quickly earn the trust of Inuit, so as to record the “natives own views of life and its problems, their own ideas expressed in their own fashion” (Rasmussen 1929:11). While both the accuracy and methodology of Rasmussen's recordings have been questioned (see Fortescue 1988; Hastrup 2016; Keith et al. 2019; Saladin d'Anglure 1988), his FTE reports remain among the most

respected and cited sources about Inuit cultures of that era. His writing is especially notable when understood as the product of a highly perceptive Inuk researcher documenting the cultures and lifeways of other Inuit.<sup>1</sup>

With the centennial anniversary of the expedition, and more scholars seizing the opportunity to define its impact and legacy, we believe it is important to introduce the question of if and how the FTE has contributed to the lives of Inuit. In 2014, Pitquhirnikkut Ilihautiniq, also known as the Kitikmeot Heritage Society, began considering how the centenary might be used to reevaluate the importance of the expedition's research for Inuinait (formerly referred to as the "Copper Eskimo" or "Copper Inuit"; see Damas 1984), a regional, and linguistically distinct, group of Inuit living in the Central Arctic.<sup>2</sup>

Pitquhirnikkut Ilihautiniq/Kitikmeot Heritage Society (PI/KHS) is an Inuit-directed community and research center in Cambridge Bay, Nunavut, dedicated to preserving and renewing Inuinait knowledge, language, and culture for the benefit of all Inuit. As part of this mission, the organization recognizes the valuable role that historical collections and ethnographic resources—such as those produced by the FTE—play in supporting Inuit efforts to enhance and disseminate Inuit knowledge in Inuit communities. For such ethnographic research to impact Inuit lives in relevant and beneficial ways, PI/KHS's work underscores the importance of separating Inuit knowledge recorded by early ethnographers from the colonial narratives and frameworks surrounding their collection. This, in turn, requires making the products and data of early research—whether in the form of written documents, photographs, material collections, or results—not only accessible to Inuit communities but available in sufficiently unmediated formats that they can be investigated, revised, and applied by Inuit. This article will review our organization's last five years of considering the FTE's legacy through community-based programming in bridging contemporary Inuinait communities with past Inuit knowledge.

### RASMUSSEN AND INUINAIT CULTURAL CHANGE

Throughout more than three years of the FTE, Rasmussen spent relatively little time among the Inuinait, with only three months of travel through their territory from the Adelaide Peninsula through the Dolphin and Union Strait during the winter of 1923–1924 (Rasmussen 1932:5). By

this stage of his expedition, Rasmussen had left behind most of his research team, save for Greenlandic companions Arnarulunnguaq and Qaavigarsuaq (see Harper and Krupnik; Kleist, *this issue*), to complete his crossing to Alaska by dog team. Rasmussen concentrated his investigations on the Umingmaktuarmiut and Kiluhiktuarmiut of the Bathurst Inlet region, before moving westward more quickly to detail encounters with coastal groups from Point Agiak to Bernard Harbour and the Liston and Sutton Islands (see Fig. 1).

While brief, Rasmussen's time with Inuinait was greatly rewarded through the quality and sheer volume of knowledge imparted to him. A corpus of 41 songs, 56 stories, 57 string figures, 377 material objects, and roughly 1000 words was documented from Inuinait (Damas 1988:139–140; Mathiassen 1945:110; Rasmussen 1932). The richness and creativity of these cultural expressions was such that Rasmussen could already foresee their future value. As he stated in the preface of his resulting volume, *Intellectual Culture of the Copper Eskimo* (Rasmussen 1932:5), "I have included everything that was told to me, even the very slender and apparently insignificant fragments, for some day they may be useful as variants and as a comparative material." As with his previous Greenlandic Thule expeditions, a strong awareness of cultural preservation motivated Rasmussen's work. His documentation, he hoped, would serve future Inuit people assimilated into Western society with tools for relearning "their old forefathers' history and illustrious achievements" (Thisted 2010:63).

Even prior to the FTE, it was recognized that Inuit across the Canadian Arctic were undergoing significant cultural change. In 1921, Diamond Jenness (1921) published an article outlining various impacts of Western society on Inuinait since initial contact roughly a decade earlier. He noted the rising "tide of civilization" across the region in the form of religious missions, Royal Canadian Mounted Police jurisdiction, and Hudson's Bay Company trading posts, resulting in the reshaping of many Inuinait traditions—from material possessions, diet, and hunting preferences to migration routes and social/religious practices. Such was the extent of this change that its progress could not be halted: "instead of a hardy primitive race of hunters living its own independent life, we shall have scattered groups of trappers, enslaved economically to the great world south of them" (Jenness 1921:550). The era precipitated a long-term transition from full-time, land-based living to community settlement that was largely



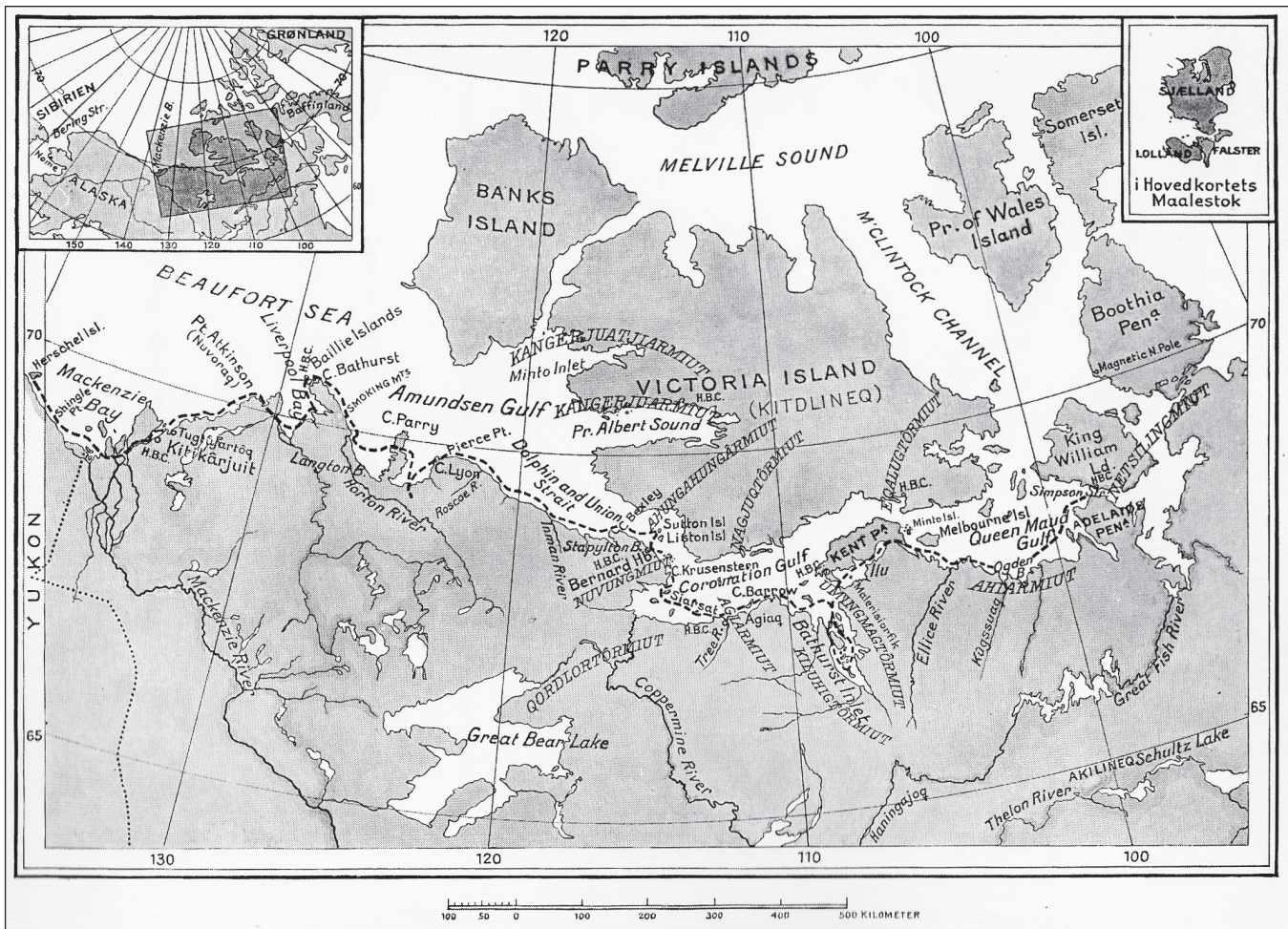


Figure 1: Map showing travel routes and Inuinnait groups encountered during Rasmussen's travel between Adelaide Peninsula and Dolphin and Union Strait.

complete by the mid-1960s. Such movement from land to town has greatly impacted the nature of Inuit knowledge held by contemporary Inuinnait communities.

Recognition of a rapidly changing Inuit society can be found throughout Rasmussen's writing about the Inuinnait. One striking example is his arrival at a Paallirmiut camp to the soundtrack of a Caruso gramophone blaring from one of the tents (Rasmussen [1927] 1969:63), which sowed a seed of doubt in the explorer's mind as to whether his expedition had arrived "about a hundred years too late" (Rasmussen 1969:63). Despite the rapid onset of cultural change, the timing of the FTE coincided with the end of an era in which many Inuit were still living, or could remember, a pre-Christian worldview and material lifestyle. As portrayed in the film *The Journals of Knud Rasmussen* (Kunuk 2006), the expedition overlapped with a highly conscious struggle by Inuit to balance traditional religious beliefs and practices with those of incoming Christianity.

Despite numerous references to imported technologies, clothing, and religion throughout Rasmussen's writings (see Rasmussen 1932:126–127, 140, 172), there is also a sense that major cultural transition was only beginning in that cultural region, and that many profound cultural patterns and customs were still in place. With time, these too would change; much of the Inuit knowledge collected by Rasmussen would not be present only a few years after his expedition (Burch 1988:92; Saladin d'Anglure 1988:59).

### GAUGING THE IMPACT OF KNUD RASMUSSEN'S WORK

Almost a decade after his time spent among Inuinnait, Rasmussen published a single ethnographic report on his cultural findings, *The Intellectual Culture of the Copper Eskimos* (1932). One of few early ethnographies written about Inuinnait, Rasmussen's work gained impor-



tance for historically understanding their culture. While Rasmussen was not the first or only anthropologist to spend time among the Inuinait—extensive research had previously been conducted in the region by Vilhjámur Stefansson and Diamond Jenness (Jenness 1921, 1923a, 1923b; Stefansson 1913, 1919, 1921; Engelstad, *this issue*)—his findings both complemented earlier work and introduced entirely new material (Damas 1988:140).

While the scholarly and historical value of Rasmussen's Inuit research is without contest, can his work be considered as important to Inuit outside of academic contexts? As described in oral history (People of Baker Lake 1979), direct encounters between Inuit and the expedition often amounted to little more than a novelty for local people. This is not to say that longer-term impacts of Rasmussen's research were not present, particularly in relation to Inuit identity. The expedition sought to unify Inuit from Greenland to America, through both creating an opportunity for Greenlanders and Canadian Inuit to meet and exchange their knowledge (Petersen 1979:62; Kleist, *this issue*) and highlighting the similarity of stories, languages, and lifeways across the geographic expanse (Thisted 2010:65). Rasmussen intended for his work to create a memorial to Inuit culture as “a people not only one in race and language, but also in their form of culture, a witness in itself to the strength and endurance and wild beauty of human life” (Rasmussen 1969:286). This sense of collective identity has become a keystone for the Inuit political movement since the late 1960s (Laugrand 2002:95–99). While uniting Inuit identity, Rasmussen's construction also imposed new geographic and ethnographic boundaries on Inuit according to the expedition's five regional groupings: Iglulik, Caribou, Netsilik, Copper, and Mackenzie Inuit (Burch 1988:2; Pedersen 1998).

Another way to consider the significance of Rasmussen's work is through its role as a bridge for Inuit knowledge from past to present Inuit societies. Inuit knowledge relates to specific engagements, understandings, and ways of being in the world that are perpetuated through intergenerational transfer and teachings. It encompasses not only activities and skills employed through past and contemporary land-based economies but also highly customized technology, terminology, and social relation-

ships. In Nunavut, this knowledge is often known as *Inuit Qaujimaqatuqangit*, or IQ, which translates from Inuktitut as “that which has long been known to Inuit” (Tester and Irniq 2008). While Inuit knowledge continues to be embedded in the memories, skills, and technology of modern people, it is challenged by increased settlement living and the loss of Elders with firsthand knowledge and experience of traditional knowledge ecosystems. In this context, the recovery and revitalization of Inuit culture has come to rely heavily on secondary sources. Thus, the FTE material—as the largest collection of ethnographic documentation of Canadian Inuit—has gained vital significance.

The ethnographic observations recorded, primarily by Rasmussen, during the FTE represent Inuit knowledge received directly from Inuit knowledge holders, whether through recorded stories and songs or via documented daily events and beliefs. While often couched within the expedition's non-Inuit narratives and research interests, Inuit knowledge still resides intact within the FTE reports. Consider an image of three Inuinait women taken by expedition photographer Leo Hansen (Fig. 2). The women stare stiffly into the camera, posed by Hansen to showcase differences in their festive clothing. Despite its artifice, the scene can be read by an Inuit knowledge expert to identify and isolate specific details of cultural importance: the symbolism implied through their outfits' designs, family resemblances in their facial features, and Inuinnaqtun terminology associated with their clothing.



Figure 2. *Umingmaktuurmiut* women in festive outfits, 1923. ES-350253. Photograph by Leo Hansen. On file at the National Museum of Denmark.

Physical objects collected by the expedition can equally be understood as material representations of Inuit knowledge. They act as repositories for Inuit knowledge when read by cultural experts with firsthand experience of their technologies, material properties, and function. Collections of tools, clothing, and other implements provide examples of Inuit knowledge and technology produced when Inuit developmental ecology was rich and still part of a flow of intergenerational transfer and skills. While many aspects of Inuit life have altered dramatically since the expedition's recordings, contemporary Inuit Elders, linguists, and land users may still possess firsthand experience of processes like object making, hunting, naming, or intergenerational teaching that supported traditional knowledge and activities. This background provides an excellent grounding to read and interpret Inuit knowledge embedded in the expedition's documentation—and to introduce that knowledge back into contemporary society.

## ACCESSING INUIT KNOWLEDGE

In his original proposal for travel across the Canadian Arctic, Rasmussen outlined three priorities for the FTE's research program (Rasmussen 1921; Michelsen, *this issue*). First, the expedition sought "to gather and write down everything that is available, the old legends, tales and traditions of bygone times, religious traditions, morals, etc." (Rasmussen 1921:59). Second, the expedition was to expand the collections at the National Museum of Denmark, acquiring ethnographic objects for the comparative study of Inuit cultures and increasing the museum's international profile (Rasmussen 1921:60). And, finally, the planned archaeological excavations would "provide important archaeological data that will illuminate Eskimo migration routes to Greenland" (Rasmussen 1921:59).

The findings from each research area were published throughout the 1920s and 1930s in 10 scholarly volumes, with a more popular early summary of the expedition produced by Rasmussen himself (Rasmussen 1925–1926, 1969). All Inuit material collections acquired by the expedition are housed at the National Museum of Denmark. Photographs, drawings, and hand-drawn maps collected from Inuit are distributed across multiple Danish institutions (see Nielsen, *this issue*), many of which are undigitized and unavailable for public consultation.<sup>3</sup> The scattered locations of the expedition's writings and collections pose serious issues for Inuit reclamation of the knowledge

they contain. Volumes of the FTE report series—now rare books and priced accordingly—rarely circulate to Arctic communities. Few Inuit have resources for travel to Denmark to visit cultural collections on display and in storage. For the increasing number of Inuit interested in recovering traditional knowledge, language, and skills, the absence of these key resources is acute.

In 2014, PI/KHS initiated a series of programs designed to bring Inuinait into renewed contact with Inuit knowledge collected by the FTE. These programs seek to increase ancestral community access to Inuit knowledge through isolating that knowledge from non-Inuit contexts surrounding its documentation, interpretation, and presentation. The following sections provide a summary of our work in relation to the key Inuinait knowledge areas of language, material culture, and people/names, as well as the creation of a new digital platform to facilitate the transfer of information collected by the FTE back to Inuit communities.

## ACCESSING LINGUISTIC KNOWLEDGE

The Inuinnaqtun language, a dialect of Inuktitut spoken by Inuinait, has fewer than 600 fluent speakers remaining. By many estimates, it may be extinct in less than two generations. As the foundation of Inuinait culture, this disappearance of Inuinnaqtun precipitates the loss of culturally unique knowledge, relationships, and engagements with the world. PI/KHS has been leading a coordinated effort to reverse the loss of Inuinnaqtun in Inuinait communities by partnering with Elders, language specialists, competent speakers, and academic linguists to document the language, mentor the next generation of speakers, and develop digital tools for knowledge sharing.

The recovery and revitalization of Inuinnaqtun relies on contemporary access to terminology (and associated layers of cultural lexicon) no longer in common use. Rasmussen's reports offer a wealth of linguistic information and remain among the most valuable, and in some cases the only, source material for many Inuinnaqtun terms.<sup>4</sup> The return (or "reuse") of this terminology toward language revitalization, however, is complicated by several factors. Rasmussen's fieldnotes employed an orthography developed by the German Moravian missionary Samuel Kleinschmidt in the 1850s to represent the West Greenlandic language; this orthography is not easily adapted to other dialects (Thuesen 2005:586). The combination of foreign orthography and Rasmussen's West

Greenlandic language bias introduced various “interferences” into Rasmussen’s texts that jeopardized its accuracy (Fortescue 1988:182).

Another issue with Rasmussen’s language work lies in the area of context. Many layers of distance exist between the actual Inuit words and songs and Rasmussen’s written accounts of them: from his recording of songs from memory following their performance to more convoluted chains of translation. “[In] the pages of Rasmussen’s *Report*—and in the many other anthologies that followed—the songs are far removed from their original performance in the *qaggiq*...although this process ‘preserves’ the songs and stories, it also deprives them of the framework in which they make sense, and in which they fulfilled their original purposes” (Martin 2009:166).

PI/KHS was originally cautious in using much of Rasmussen’s terminology for language revitalization purposes due to these interpretive filters. We were inspired, however, by Michael Fortescue’s charge regarding the critical next step—for Rasmussen’s linguistic work “to be transcribed into standard phonemic versions to render them more directly accessible to the descendants of the people who actually provided them” (Fortescue 1988:190).

In 2018, PI/KHS created a program specifically designed to translate all Inuinnaqtun texts and words from Rasmussen’s Fifth Thule report (Rasmussen 1932) into contemporary Inuinnaqtun orthography. A team of language experts across several Inuinnaqtun communities was organized, with Emily Kudlak of Ulukhaktok overseeing the transcription of Inuinnaqtun songs and stories, and Gwen Angulalik, Jimmy Ogina, and Margaret Ogina of Cambridge Bay collecting and transcribing unique words for entry into PI/KHS’s ongoing virtual Inuinnaqtun lexicon.<sup>5</sup> This was a powerful experience for the participants: the use of contemporary Roman script, not to mention written rather than spoken forms, doing little to diminish the impression that the words were moving closer to those originally spoken by ancestors.

The primary importance of the translation work was that words used a century ago could once more gain meaning and circulation: performed during drum dances, passed between people as stories, and mined for new technical meanings to enhance the accuracy and scope of modern conversations. To further enhance the impact of this project, PI/KHS released a free PDF publication of all Inuinnaqtun content from Rasmussen’s work (PI/KHS 2018), which continues to see extensive use throughout the Inuinnaqtun communities.

## ACCESSING MATERIAL KNOWLEDGE

Over the course of the FTE, some 3000 ethnographic artifacts were collected, with roughly 2000 of these coming from Canadian Inuit east of the Mackenzie Delta and 370 specifically from Inuinnaqtun (Mathiassen 1945:110). Since their acquisition, these collections have been stored, exhibited, and cared for at the National Museum of Denmark’s facilities in Brede and Copenhagen. Due to the expedition’s timing, the objects acquired from Inuinnaqtun gain importance as reference material on lifeways and beliefs prior to significant influence by non-Inuit cultures. As many Inuinnaqtun continue to engage in similar activities, such as land navigation and travel, hunting and fishing, and domestic tool production from local resources, this background provides them with an excellent vantage point from which to read and interpret Inuit knowledge embedded in historical objects.

Physically uniting contemporary Inuinnaqtun with FTE collections for interpretive purposes is difficult, and this has greatly impacted the ability to learn from them. As indicated by many studies bridging museum and archival collections with Inuit knowledge (Gadoua 2013, 2014; Griebel 2013:253–285; Jørgensen 2017; Lyons 2013; Lyons et al. 2010), material presence, physical interaction, and sensual engagement remain key elements for meaningful interaction between historical collections and contemporary people.

In 2015, PI/KHS began working with the National Museum of Denmark to gain access to Inuinnaqtun collections and extract Inuit knowledge. A PI/KHS team traveled to Denmark to visit the National Museum of Denmark to assess and inventory their collection of Inuinnaqtun resources. This trip was followed by a second visit with Elders and translators in December 2017. Cambridge Bay Elders Bessie Pihoak Omilgoetok and Joseph Tikhak, both descendants of Inuinnaqtun who met with the FTE crew, spent multiple days connecting to Inuinnaqtun objects and providing rich cultural information about them, including identifying uses and Inuinnaqtun names for each object and its parts (Fig. 3). While many of these objects are no longer made in Inuinnaqtun society, they are familiar to Elders from their childhood and early adulthood and opened gateways to related stories from that time. Pihoak, in particular, marveled at the collection of parkas, noting the cut of various patterns and the skillful level of stitching involved in their creation. All proceedings from the workshop were video documented and archived at PI/KHS in recognition





*Figure 3. Bessie Pihoak Omilgoetok examines an Inuinnaït parka collected by Rasmussen and stored at the National Museum of Denmark.*

that this is likely the last generation of Inuinnaït Elders who will be able to connect to the objects with such a level of familiarity and linguistic fluency.

Since the visits to Copenhagen, engagement with the FTE collections has continued through multiple programs in Cambridge Bay designed to transfer Inuit material knowledge back to the community. Pihoak's interest in the Inuinnaït parkas encouraged the formation of a new sewing program and eventual museum exhibit focused on the evolution of Inuinnaït parka fashions over the last 150 years (PI/KHS 2019, and the virtual exhibit site at [www.patternsofchange.ca](http://www.patternsofchange.ca)). A downloadable PDF guidebook to accompany the exhibit is available in both English and French ([www.kitikmeotheritage.ca/educational-resources](http://www.kitikmeotheritage.ca/educational-resources)). This program brought community members, language experts, and local Elders together to review the chronology and diversity of historical parka patterns, record terminology associated with their manufacture and use, and revive past parka styles for contemporary use. Among the program's deliverables is a community sewing pattern library in Cambridge Bay to encourage ongoing and accessible tactile engagement with parkas of the past.

The ability to build Inuit knowledge from Inuinnaït collections requires the merger of two key elements: historical objects and contemporary expertise. The material collections of the FTE play an integral role in providing physical examples of craftsmanship, resource use, and technological design. Even more than this, they serve as mnemonics that allow Elders to recall and relate experi-

ences from their own lives and draw collections back into contemporary processes of knowledge transfer and use.

### ACCESSING KNOWLEDGE OF PEOPLE AND NAMES

Rasmussen was rigorous in his census taking among Inuinnaït, basing his estimates of local population on both actual accounts and the interviewing of people from regions he could not visit himself (Damas 1988:139). As RCMP Inspector Stuart Wood commented on examining Rasmussen's diary in 1924, it held "the names of every native he met or could get in touch with" (Treude 2004:5). Rasmussen was particularly attentive in acknowledging the names of his sources for Inuit knowledge and authors of the songs and stories he recorded. His extensive use of personal names provides incredibly useful information to support research of Inuinnaït genealogy and naming.

In 2016, PI/KHS launched a program in Cambridge Bay to bridge the knowledge of local Elders with information about individual Inuinnaït recovered from Rasmussen's report. Beginning in the 1930s, traditional Inuit naming practices were affected by federal policies and administrative practices, with names sometimes being incorrectly recorded. Naming is deeply embedded in Inuit lives via the use of the *atig*, or "name soul," through which the characteristics, skills, and spirit of an individual are passed down through generations (Dupré 2009). The very continuity of Inuit communities is upheld through the transfer of the names:

Each name carries a history as well as a network of relationships. Through the names passed down, society reproduces itself and connects to its past. A complex system of terms of address ensures that the relationships embedded in the names are acknowledged. (Oosten and Laugrand 2010:130)

Since the advent of the FTE, Inuinnaït naming practices, along with the kinship structures and social obligations that accompany them, have gradually eroded from everyday use. Recent years, however, have seen a rekindling of traditional naming among younger generations, often without full knowledge of family trees or historical naming protocols. In 2015, PI/KHS used the various names present within Rasmussen's 1924 census of Inuinnaït to begin building comprehensive genealogical charts for Inuinnaït families in Cambridge Bay. The names of Inuinnaït mentioned throughout Rasmussen's report—in addition to place names, songs, stories, and narratives at-

tributed to them—were systematically documented and paired with a collection of local family trees, family registers, and baptismal records created by Cambridge Bay-based Roman Catholic priests in the 1950s. Local college students assisted Elders in charting their family trees back to names mentioned by Rasmussen and uploading them to a digital family tree platform. Elders, in turn, instructed students in the importance of traditional kinship networks and the social obligations that accompany these relationships. To date, approximately 1150 Inuinnaït individuals have found their place on 17 family trees extending back to the time of Rasmussen's visit, a feat made possible only thanks to his detailed census taking.

Research into Inuinnaït individuals encountered by Rasmussen has also been facilitated through photographs. Expedition photographer Leo Hansen took over 80 photographs of Inuinnaït during his time with Rasmussen (Jørgensen, *this issue*). The power of historical images of Inuit as “memory prompts and sites of social engagement” (Payne 2011:97) has been well documented through image repatriation projects such as Library and Archives Canada's Project Naming Initiative (Greenhorn 2005, 2013; Haskell 2017). In 2015, PI/KHS began working with the National Museum of Denmark to transfer these photographs back to Inuinnaït under creative commons licensing. In September 2018, Arctic curators Anne Mette Jørgensen from the National Museum of Denmark and Tone Wang from the Museum of Cultural History in Oslo traveled to Cambridge Bay to build more information around these images (NMDK 2020). Elders' reactions on seeing the images of their grandparents, in some cases for the first time, were a testament to the profound emotional connection such images can bring.

## THE FIFTH THULE DIGITAL ATLAS

The ethnographic writings, photos, names, and objects collected by the FTE continue to be relevant for Inuinnaït due to the Inuit knowledge they contain. Their relevance also depends on their availability to Inuinnaït populations. Inuit visits to Fifth Thule museum collections are expensive, and the large-scale repatriation of physical collections to Nunavut is fraught with political and logistical barriers (Keith et al. 2019). It was this need for broader access to Inuit knowledge that originally prompted PI/KHS to seek digital alternatives.

In 2014, PI/KHS approached the Geomatics and Cartographic Research Centre (GCRC) at Carleton

University, Ottawa, for assistance in developing a digital platform capable of databasing and displaying the multiple forms of Inuit knowledge gathered by the FTE. From the project's inception, the digital platform's design was to meet four basic goals:

1. Provide digital access to Inuit knowledge gathered on the FTE.
2. Provide opportunities for Inuit to verify and enhance knowledge collected by the expedition.
3. Link the results of contemporary research and Inuit experiences to expedition findings.
4. Create opportunities for Nunavummiut to interact with expedition objects and environments in augmented reality environments.

Using the GCRC-developed Nunaliit framework (Hayes et al. 2014), PI/KHS created an innovative digital tool called the Fifth Thule Atlas that allows users to discover all Inuit content collected by the FTE while digitally re-navigating the expedition's route.

A major challenge of this project was the representation of Inuit knowledge's dynamic nature in a digital format. To best accomplish this, the Atlas allows for Inuit knowledge to be approached through three different forms of user interface (see Keith et al. 2019 for an extensive overview of the project). The first interface offers a path to access knowledge cartographically through an area map that visualizes locations such as the expedition routes, significant places, and Inuit camps encountered by the expedition (Fig. 4). Clicking on locations within the map summons all cultural documentation related to that place, such as photos of Inuit who once occupied the area, scans of the maps they drew, and transcribed songs and stories collected at each site. This spatial aspect to accessing knowledge was considered integral to maintaining ongoing relationships between Inuit knowledge, identity, and place (Lyons et al. 2010) and upholding the lineage and ancestral ties connected to specific geographic areas.

The second form of Atlas interface provides access to interactive PDF versions of all published FTE reports containing relevant cultural material (Fig. 5). With the original hard-copy reports of the expedition so difficult to obtain, such digital versions can be widely distributed and read much like a traditional book by scrolling backward and forward through the pages. An additional benefit of the PDF is that its content is fully searchable via keywords. While the Atlas's emphasis remains one of Inuit knowledge, the book format allows this knowledge to be contextualized according to the research interests,





*Figure 4. A screenshot of the Fifth Thule Atlas map interface depicting the Inuinnait region. A timeline along the bottom introduces a temporal element to users' searches for Inuit knowledge.*

methodologies, and narratives that surrounded its documentation. To encourage Inuit to enhance knowledge collected by the expedition team, a parallel version of each report exists specifically for community-based input. Every knowledge document entered in the Atlas (whether a book page, a photograph, or a transcribed song) is accompanied by a community-driven report that allows users to add information, edit content, or contribute additional metadata. Users can upload text, photos, and other media or record live audio and video contributions straight from their computer. This parallel version of the Fifth Thule Report seeks to amend inaccuracies in the data collected by the expedition and enhance or qualify its meaning in a more contemporary context.

The final form of engaging the Atlas allows users to interact directly with specific categories of knowledge, such as place names, people, songs, photographs, maps, and travel routes. This interface exists as a series of visual “tiles,” which can be navigated according to the user’s specific interests (Fig. 6). If a user is interested only in people documented by the expedition, they can click the “person” category to easily access all individuals encoun-

tered. When a desired person is selected from that list, the tiles further repopulate with all information related to that individual, including the places they were encountered, tools they created, and songs, stories, and maps they authored.

As of 2020, the Fifth Thule Atlas provides access to Inuit knowledge drawn from expedition reports and photos relating only to the Inuinnait cultural region. This content is freely available to the public at [www.thuleatlas.org](http://www.thuleatlas.org). While the tools are in place to expand the Atlas into other Inuit regions visited by the expedition, there are potential questions of regionalism and knowledge ownership that must first be considered and negotiated. Is it the role of a regional Inuinnait organization to digitally repatriate the archives and collections of other Inuit areas? Does the format that Inuinnait have chosen to represent their cultural materials and knowledge within the Atlas apply to other Inuit groups? It is our hope that the FTE’s centennial anniversary will create the opportunities to begin working with other Inuit groups and make Inuit knowledge more accessible to communities across the North.

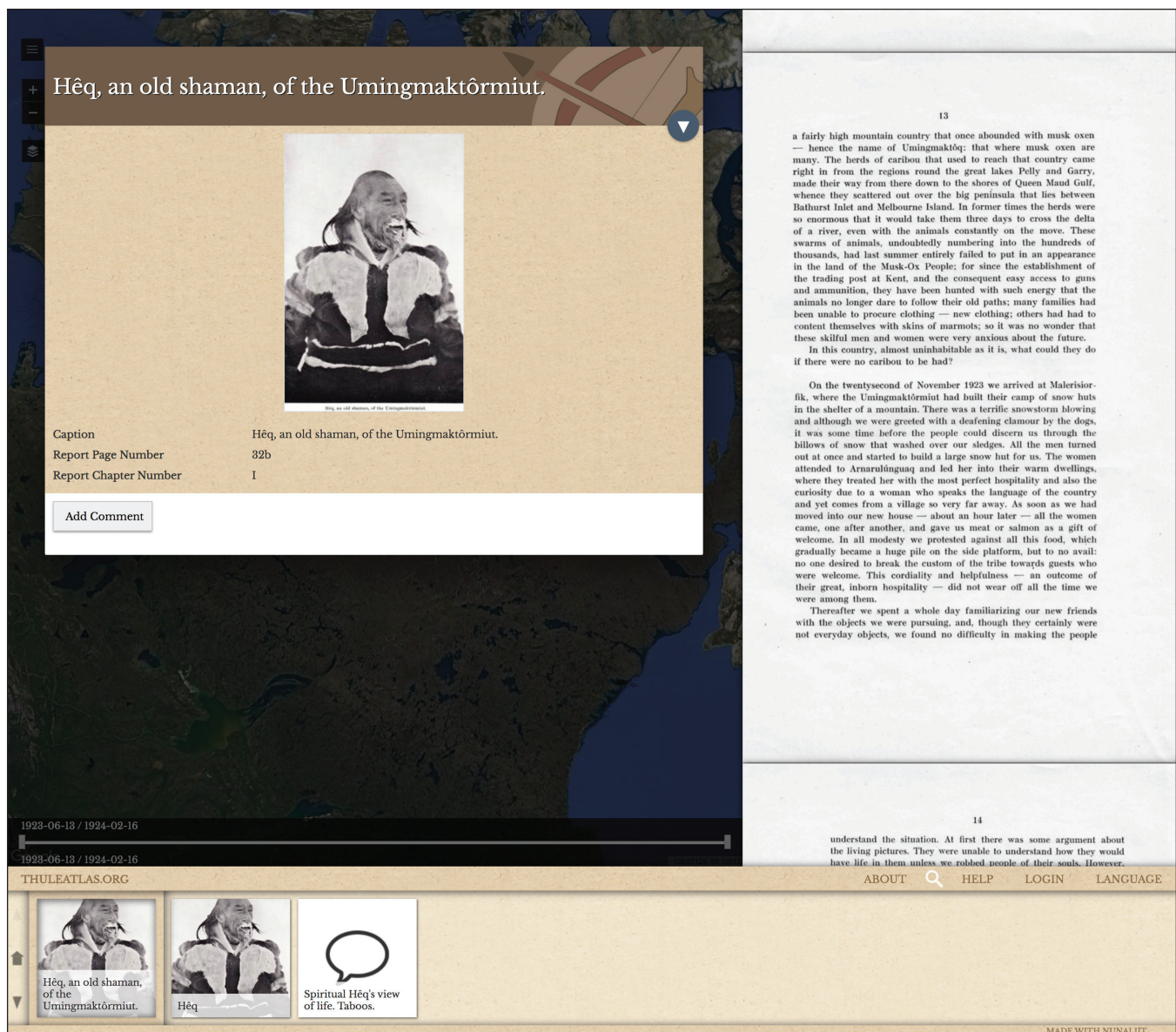


Figure 5. The PDF version of the Fifth Thule Expedition reports is searchable through keywords and designed to provide direct access to Inuit knowledge contained on each page, which appears in the form of tiles at the bottom of the screen.

## CONCLUSION

The FTE documented a vast repository of Inuit knowledge, with its reports, photographs, and material collections among the most comprehensive tangible records available for early Inuit beliefs and lifeways. Notably, Rasmussen's ethnographic work was singular for its cultural and linguistic fluency and attention to detail. This body of research remains significant a full century after its collection, not only because it increases our understandings of Inuit societies at that time but also because it helps transmit vital cultural information to contemporary

Inuit. When properly accessed, Fifth Thule research allows Inuit to situate their own experiences within a larger continuum of Inuit tradition and knowledge.

For Inuinnait, the transition from a lifestyle entirely reliant on the land to one of townships, a wage-based economy, and imported materials was rapid and often took place outside of their control. This change resulted in the breakdown of mechanisms for ensuring the maintenance and transfer of unique knowledge and relationships between landscape, language, and people. As Inuinnait move toward the restoration and revival of these intricate connections, they require waymarkers from past generations to



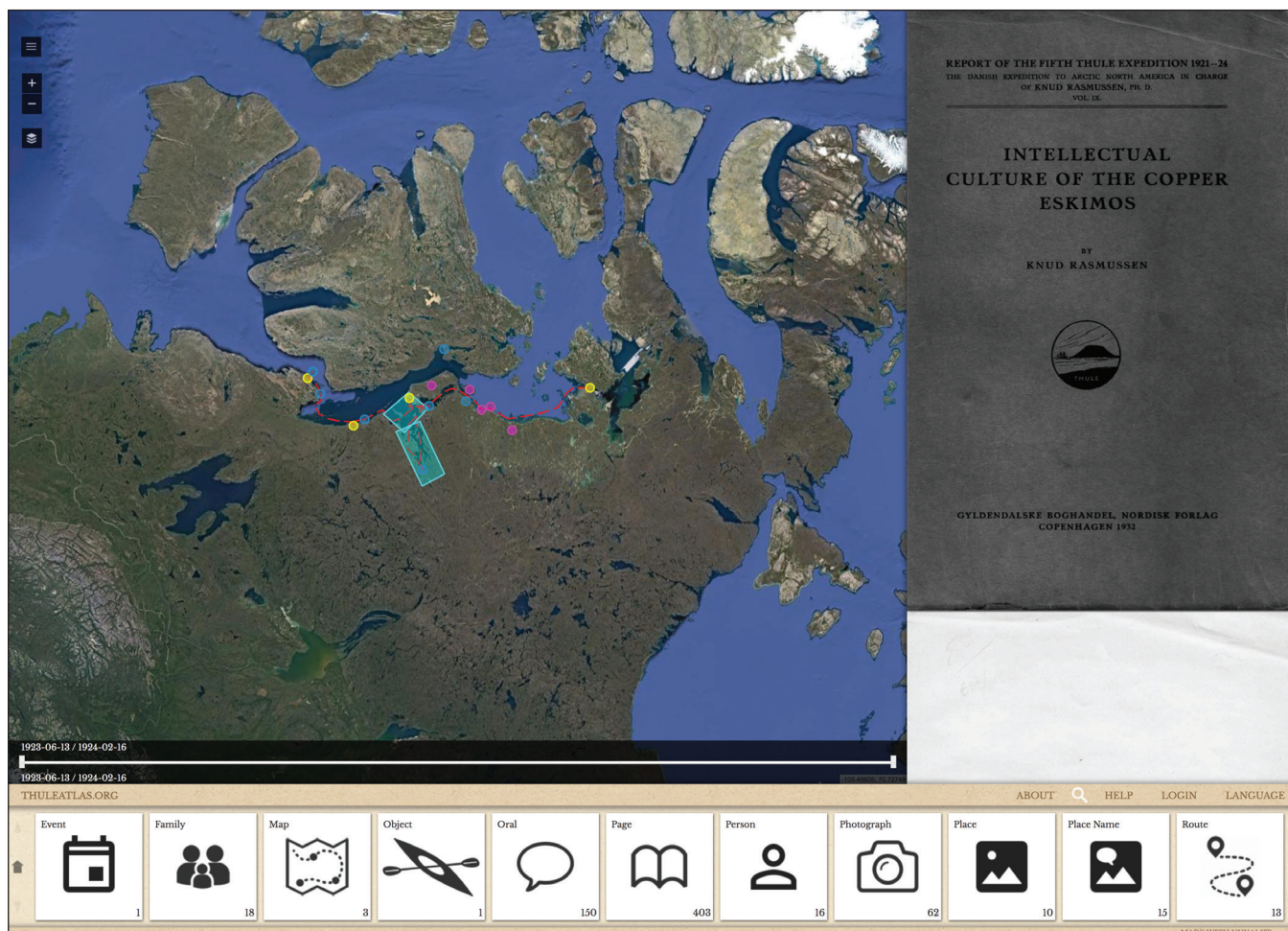


Figure 6. A scrollable selection of knowledge tiles allows users to explore Inuit knowledge by category based on their specific interests.

guide their route. Much of the ethnographic documentation about early Inuit is riddled with cross-cultural (mis) interpretation, to an extent that the voices and actions of original Inuit informants no longer shine through. While the FTE has received criticism to this effect, there is no arguing that Rasmussen's unique status as a researcher fluent in Inuit language and lifeways provided an unparalleled level of familiarity, detail, and respect concerning the people and knowledge he recorded.

Over the last five years, PI/KHS has delivered multiple programs to assist Inuinnait with the access and recovery of Inuit knowledge so carefully documented by Rasmussen. By merging this documentation with the experiences of contemporary Elders, language experts, and younger generations, we have provided an avenue for critical Inuit knowledge to reawaken and activate within the minds, teachings, and practices of Inuinnait communities. The value of Rasmussen's work for Inuinnait,

in accordance with his original goals of cultural preservation, ultimately lies in this ability to reunite Inuinnait with themselves.

## NOTES

1. Throughout his life, Knud Rasmussen self-identified as Inuk on both genetic and ideological grounds (cf. Thalbitzer 1934:585). While perhaps not accepted as such by Greenlandic Inuit, the Canadian Inuit Rasmussen encountered were likely more open to embracing his identity. He was fluent in their language, proficient in their ancestors' tools and travel technologies, and fully engaged in an Inuktut way of life. Rasmussen was not the only Inuk member of the expedition (see Kleist, *this issue*), as several Greenlandic Inuit took part and assisted with the recording of cultural data, even though the ex-



tent of their contributions and insight into the Inuit lives they encountered was largely undocumented. The only exception was Jacob Olsen, a Greenlandic Inuk, whose *Akilinermiulersaarut*, an account in the Kalaallisut language, contains a selection of Inuit legends primarily from the Aivilik region (Olsen 1927). Unfortunately, Olsen was not present during travel through the Inuinnaqtun region.

2. The term *Inuinnaqtun*, meaning “the people” in the Inuinnaqtun language, is a contemporary ethnonym used by Inuit to represent the collective identity of a distinct regional group occupying the same area Rasmussen identified for the “Copper Eskimo.” Throughout the early twentieth century, the group numbered about 800 people, divided into regional subgroups who self-identified according to environmental features in their territorial landscapes. While sharing a distinct dialect of Inuktitut known as Inuinnaqtun, and many unique features of clothing and material culture, the group’s amalgamation as a single cultural entity is largely a product of regional categorization by non-Inuit explorers and researchers, the FTE being a notable example. Formerly referred to as the “Copper Eskimo,” or “Copper Inuit,” by non-Inuit, Inuit are increasingly rejecting these terms in favor of the self-determined name of “Inuinnaqtun.” This article uses all the above terms interchangeably, favoring Inuinnaqtun in all cases other than direct citation of other publications.
3. The centennial of the FTE combined with increasing Inuit advocacy shows promise for addressing the accessibility of its various collections. A program initiated by the Danish Arctic Institute (see Nielsen, *this issue*) has begun to create a registry detailing where all records relating to the expedition can be found in Denmark. The National Museum of Denmark has also launched the Tumisiut Project, designed to create wider sharing of Inuit cultural heritage recorded by the expedition (NMDK 2020).
4. Of importance to this terminology, and in testament to Rasmussen’s linguistic abilities, is that recorded terms exist for both eastern (Umingmaktuarmiut) and western (Kangiryuarmiut) subdialects of the Inuinnaqtun language. Rasmussen collected his vocabulary primarily from the Bathurst Inlet region, rather than the Coppermine region favored by earlier anthropological studies. This captured an extensive

subdialect of Inuinnaqtun, which may have otherwise gone largely unrecorded (Fortescue 1988:181).

5. The Inuinnaqtun lexicon is a digital platform created in partnership between PI/KHS and Carleton University’s Geomatics and Cartographic Research Centre to allow Inuinnaqtun specialists in Kugluktuk, Ulukhaktok, Cambridge Bay, and Gjoa Haven to collaborate in the compilation and documentation of various regional Inuinnaqtun dialects. It can be accessed through PI/KHS’s website at [www.kitikmeotheritage.ca/digital-strategies](http://www.kitikmeotheritage.ca/digital-strategies).

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